

Plant Protection and Quarantine Officer
(Plant Health Safeguarding Specialist)
GS-0436-11

Introduction

The incumbent is the primary liaison for the Agency on operational activities, in a specific geographical area, works with state officials, other agencies, industry, colleges and universities and others interested in activities affected by Agency plant quarantine programs. The incumbent performs a variety of specialized duties that provide a comprehensive approach to biosecurity minimizing the risk of biological and economic damage caused by exotic, non-native plant and animal organisms to agriculture, natural resources and U.S. trade initiatives involving overall plant health activities. The successful accomplishment of these duties is critical to preventing or reducing potential biological, agricultural, economic and environmental losses. The duties and functions performed by the incumbent are vital to the mission of APHIS, PPQ and its programs to safeguard U.S. agriculture and natural resources.

II. DUTIES

The major duties for this position are conducted at Plant Inspection Stations, International Ports of Entry, and other geographical areas within the United States. The major duties include exclusion, complex treatments, export activities, permitting and compliance, and pest detection activities. The incumbent performs a variety of specialized duties that may include any combination of the following:

A. The incumbent is responsible for managing multiple program areas and/or a multi-faceted program such as: post entry quarantine, gypsy moth, biological control, grasshopper/Mormon cricket, Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), biotechnology, noxious weeds, boll weevil, or other pests for which a program is or will be developed. Anticipates and provides solutions for problems in program areas without the direction of the supervisor.

(1) Provides recommendations to the supervisor and staff on design and development of guidelines, operational standards and procedures; drafts proposals or work plans and financial plans to be used for survey, sampling, control, trace back, regulatory, methods development and improvement and/or eradication phases of programs or other projects carried out within their geographical area of responsibility. 2) Plans, coordinates, and conducts all aspects of operational activities including special programs, newly emerging programs or operational functions with cooperators, other government entities, industries, private citizens and other stakeholders, including pest survey programs, treatments for newly introduced exotic pests. 3) Using the area's climatological, topographical and biological data and other information, predicts and plans program activities to achieve the goals of PPQ programs within a geographical area of responsibility using various scientific and analytical techniques and upon request, incumbent collects insects, pathogens, plants and/or weeds. Identifies or verifies identification of noxious weeds and plant pests, such as plant pathogens, insects and nematodes, and plant pest hosts and geographical distribution found within the incumbent's geographical area. Conducts/oversees pre-pest identification responsibilities (e.g. screening) and has specific knowledge of pest identification and control measures within the area of responsibility. 4) Tracks the progress of the programs for which the incumbent is responsible in specific geographical area in order to provide technical assistance in program operations. Submits reports which summarize the progress of PPQ's programs within their geographical area of responsibility. Such summaries would include but are not limited to: summary of survey results; summary of complaints and treatments; summary of actions taken by state and local entities, private groups and consortiums; and summary and documentation of environmental concerns and activities. 5) Participates in public awareness activities, public hearings and information sharing meetings, as well as training and technology transfers to public and private stakeholders about specific

program areas and concerns, including a variety of Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS), PPQ and emergency programs. 6) Directs the activities of various seasonal subordinates on recurring basis. Recruits, interviews and recommends for hire personnel to participate in specific programs. Reviews work for accuracy, completeness, and compliance with established procedures. Identifies on-the-job-training needs, develops and delivers appropriate general and technical training to seasonal employees and provides for quality control during the survey season. 7) Provides technical advice which affects the international, interstate, and the intrastate movement of crops, agricultural products, equipment and packing material. Participates in the preparation of environmental documentation which includes site-specific assessments. Works in accordance with national environmental laws and regulations on the use of pesticides, biological organisms, or other technologies for treatments of newly introduced exotic pests. 8) Participates in State, Regional and National emergency programs as needed.

B. Trade facilitation and Export Certification duties include: 1) Serves as accredited certifying official regarding export certification. The work includes interpreting foreign quarantine regulations to facilitate international trade, issuing Federal Phytosanitary Certificates (FPC), ensuring proper maintenance of the fee collection process, 2) Interprets and enforces Federal and parallel State domestic quarantines and regulatory orders restricting the interstate and intrastate movement or shipment of plants, plant products, animal by-products, and other materials, within and out of the United States. The incumbent issues permits or reports for the foreign, interstate or intrastate movement of regulated articles in compliance with regulations and standards, and 3) Conducts pest surveys as requested that will provide supporting data for international trade negotiations in order to export U.S. commodities.

C. Regulatory exclusion duties include: 1) Provides specialized inspection, regulation and clearance of high risk propagative plant material, plant products and pest diagnostic identification services at plant inspection stations and/or other facilities. Coordinates quarantine actions with state(s), 2) Conducts and/or assists with inter- and intra-state inspections of commodity and conveyance movements, including the monitoring/inspection cargo planes for Japanese beetle, 3) Applies regulations, facilitates clearances, and related activities, such as compliance with requirements of agriculture protocols and systems, in connection with the pre-clearance of commodities in foreign countries, 4) Assists SITC in conducting market blitzes or targeted inspections of known or suspected violators of agriculture statutes, 5) Participates in pre-clearance programs on TDY assignment in foreign countries assisting other APHIS entities, 6) Recommends and submits application lists for the inclusion of commodities in the line release program in order to expedite the movement of agriculture commodities, and 7) Provides oversight of pre-clearance programs. Provides training and orientation to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel and oversees military cooperators on new and existing pre-clearance programs.

D. Complex Treatment duties include: 1) Plans, conducts, and/or supervises various treatments and remedial measures such as disinfection, sterilization, fumigation, cold treatment, hot water treatment, irradiation of regulated articles for plant and animal pests and diseases, 2) Interprets and applies regulatory measures used to eradicate foreign pest introductions, 3) Identifies when regulated sites, facilities, and commodities shall be inspected or re-inspected for treatment and control effectiveness with determinations projected for subsequent survey, inspection, or control options, 4) Validates in-transit cold treatments, including review of technical documentation and ensures proper adherence to protocols by foreign countries and duty stations, and 5) Conducts certification of vessels and warehouses for cold treatment.

E. Permitting and Compliance duties include: 1) Has a broad range of responsibilities under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), including review of permits, seizure of shipments without proper documents, safeguarding seized or forfeited property, maintenance of accurate files on CITES transactions, 2) Conducts facility and field inspections and provides necessary permit information for biotechnology institutions, laboratories receiving imported plant pests, soil, etc. Prepares and executes compliance agreements with regulated establishments, cooperators, treatment facilities, establishments, etc. Reviews and revises compliance agreements as conditions warrant, 3) Performs and enforces the procedures and policies concerning post-entry quarantine, biotechnology quarantine facilities and release of agents, and laboratory (soil, pathogens, insects, etc.) inspection procedures.

III. FACTORS

1. KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION: Professional knowledge of pertinent regulations, policies and procedures of agricultural quarantine principles, export, post-entry quarantine, treatments and methods, biotechnology, quarantine facilities and release of agents, and laboratory (e.g. soil, pathogens, insects, etc.) inspection procedures for application to PPQ program activities and interstate/domestic movement of regulated articles.

Knowledge of biological and scientific principles, techniques of collection and identification, and sufficient taxonomical expertise and knowledge in order to identify plants pests, plants, weeds, insect and nematodes to plan and carry out the activities of programs within their geographic area of responsibility.

Technical expertise in order to develop, propose, and recommend substantial State, Program or regional program innovations, significant Program changes, or alternate courses of critical management action, and skill in applying recent advances and research findings to adjustments in operations plans.

Knowledge of provisions of the sanitary / phytosanitary agreement and biological and agricultural science, principles, and concepts practices in order to serve as the technical authority for the full range of activities within the state.

Knowledge of substances and treatment technologies such as the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), Reduced Agent Area Treatments (RAATS), fumigations, herbicides, pesticides and associated equipment, pesticide certification is required.

Knowledge of foreign and domestic guidelines for commodities requiring phytosanitary certifications sufficient to issue Federal Phytosanitary Certificates, limited permits and reports.

Knowledge of basic computer knowledge skills are required for use of Agency information management communication systems. Incumbent must be able to work with GIS, GPS systems, phenology models, and various software programs including mapping programs, to conduct an analysis of data, and use database programs to assist in the development of survey programs.

Skill in oral and written communication to advise, consult, inform and negotiate with other Federal and State officials and other agencies and groups.

Knowledge of agriculture production and commodity management practices in specialized areas to give recommendations of modification in practices at the producer/local/State levels in ways that better support export protocols.

Knowledge of the budgetary process, workload analysis, and organizational structure sufficient to conduct studies, make immediate and long range plans in order to meet current and projected program requirements.

2. SUPERVISORY CONTROLS: Incumbent works under the general direction of the State Plant Health Director, Officer in Charge, or other appropriate designee who in consultation with the incumbent develops deadlines and overall direction, objectives and resources to accomplish the work. Incumbent is responsible for independently planning, designing, coordinating, and implementing the program objectives throughout their geographical area of responsibility, particular areas or programs, evaluating progress, and proposing as necessary, program changes to overcome difficulties experienced during the operational aspects of the programs.

Technical recommendations are normally accepted without significant change. Work is reviewed in terms of meeting program objectives and effectiveness in resolving programmatic deficiencies and coordination

among interested parties. Incumbent will need to be a self starter who is able to plan and schedule activities and meetings, often working without direct supervision.

3. GUIDELINES: Various Federal laws, State laws, international policies, Executive Orders, quarantine regulations, cooperative agreements, operational plans, financial plans, policies, and directives guide the incumbent's actions. Additional guidelines include program regulations, manuals, joint memoranda of understanding (MOU), scientific and technical literature, APHIS pesticide certification programs, export certification and cooperative agreement policies and procedures.

Independent initiative and experienced judgment is required to modify or recommend the modification or accepted methods and practices and develop techniques appropriate for the successful resolution of deficiencies and problems encountered. Evaluates local practice and makes recommendations for change and departs from standard procedures if necessary to complete assignments.

4. COMPLEXITY: This position provides varied and diverse assignments and involves broad and markedly different activities associated with technical and scientific issues and activities and managerial demands in coordinating the available resources. The independent evaluation and analysis conducted by the incumbent of the ongoing programs within the Program requires the assessment of unusual circumstances and issues and the skillful adjustment of methods, procedures, and plans to overcome the unexpected difficulties.

Incumbent makes independent and expert decisions in regards to problem resolution which involves such areas as recommending the development and implementation of new or revised operations or procedures, the initiation of guides for operating unit personnel, and the evaluation and analysis of the program execution and operation phases. The incumbent must exercise a high degree of resourcefulness and ingenuity in devising or reviewing long-range and short-range solutions to problems of a unique or novel nature which preclude the application of standardized methods.

5. SCOPE AND EFFECT: The purpose of the work is to participate in the planning, development and accomplishment of the overall plans and objectives of the geographical area of responsibility, and to make recommendations to implement and manage all aspects of the various activities throughout the Program. The decisions and recommendations of the incumbent will have long-range effects on the future of PPQ programs, their goals and objectives, and the acceptance by the public and various interest groups.

The cooperative functions and technical advice rendered to management are of equal importance since they affect the international, interstate and the intrastate movement of crops and agricultural products. The incumbent will need to show good cooperative efforts to further the objectives for the detection, monitoring and control of pests that could be a threat to the American agriculture and the environment.

The incumbent interprets regulations or procedures which affect export certification processes which may have national and international implications impacting trade and commerce. As a technical authority, the incumbent provides procedural and technical guidance to the assigned work area. The work performed helps ensure the development and effectiveness of sound biological programs and policies and quality of regulatory decisions made at all levels in PPQ, including politically sensitive trade issues.

6. PERSONAL CONTACTS: Interagency contacts include the staff officers, program managers and pest management professionals within PPQ. Contacts also include officials in other Federal agencies i.e. Department of Homeland Security, Forest Service, military as well as State, County, organized farm groups, individual farm owners, cooperators, stakeholders, contractors, and others in similar positions in related agencies or in private groups, and local community officials to conduct program operations. In some instances, the incumbent conducts or participates as an agency representative at public forums or meetings.

There may be certain instances when the incumbent is required to communicate directly with foreign agriculture officials.

7. PURPOSE OF CONTACTS: The purpose of contacts is for planning and conducting program operations and to establish and maintain contacts with individuals and organizations through establishment of working agreements or who may have opposing viewpoints and/or who apply pressure to further their specific goals. Meetings, particularly with key State, County, and local officials, may involve decisions and commitments which have important implications for overall agency programs and objectives of a far-reaching nature. Public forums and meetings with other officials, particularly with key Federal, State, County and local officials, often involve discussions of controversial technical points, clarification and explanation of requirements and policies, and commitments having important implications for overall agency programs and objectives. Uses tact and diplomacy, technical expertise, program experience, and knowledge of policies and regulations to obtain an acceptable point of view or develop suitable alternative solutions to problems.

8. PHYSICAL DEMANDS: Field visits may require physical exertion such as walking over rough or rocky terrain or climbing ladders on rail cars or grain elevators. Work may involve driving long distances, occasionally in poor driving conditions. Loading, unloading and carrying moderately heavy materials is sometimes necessary. Some administrative and laboratory-type tasks may require sitting at a desk or table for long periods of time. Use of computers is required. The incumbent may also be required to operate other equipment as required in the operation of a particular Pest Detection Survey Program. Operation of such equipment as ATV's application equipment may be needed.

9. WORK ENVIRONMENT: Work takes place in offices and in a variety of other outdoor locations. Some activities occur in isolated rural areas. Employees may experience discomfort due to adverse weather conditions, high noise levels, pesticides and working around agricultural or industrial equipment. Incumbents will be required to travel to remote locations at various facilities and may be required to spend extended periods of time at these locations, usually not more than 30 days. The incumbent must also be to travel on a routine basis and be willing to work at odd times, including overtime, weekends, holidays and shifts. The incumbent may be required to maintain certification for the wearing of personal protective equipment, including respirators such as Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) and maintain a valid pesticide certification.